

# **Proposed Action and Purpose and Need Thousand Springs Forest Health Project**

**U.S. Forest Service  
Lassen National Forest  
Hat Creek Ranger District  
Shasta County, California**

## **BACKGROUND**

The Hat Creek Ranger District is starting analysis on the Thousand Springs Forest Health Project (Thousand Springs Project, Project) located between 1 and 2 miles north of the community of Dana, California, Township 38 North, Range 4 East, Sections 17, 18, 19, 20 and Township 38 North, Range 3 East, Section 13. The project lies within a wildland urban interface (WUI) zone that has been prioritized for treatment due to a combination of excessive fuel levels, proximity to residences, and frequency of public use.

The purpose of this project is to reduce fuel levels and increase fire resiliency on 276 acres of predominantly eastside pine habitat on the Hat Creek Ranger District. Treatments within the project area include sawlog and biomass thinning and follow-up prescribed fire. The project intends to integrate new treatments on National Forest System (NFS) lands with existing treatments on adjacent private lands. This project is supported by the Burney-Hat Creek Community Forest and Watershed group and the Burney Fire Safe Council.

## **MANAGEMENT DIRECTION**

The proposed action is guided by the 1992 Lassen National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) and 1993 Record of Decision (ROD) (USDA-FS 1993), as amended by the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan (SNFP) Amendment FEIS and ROD (USDA-FS 2004a,b), and the SNFP Management Indicator Species Amendment (USDA-FS 2007). The Project is located in the Wiley Management Area under the Lassen LRMP.

The Thousand Springs Project is designed to be consistent with the National Forest Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1600), National Environmental Policy Act (36 CFR 220), National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 470), Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. 1531), Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. 1351), Clean Air Act (42 U.S.C. 7401), and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (42 U.S.C. 6901 et seq.).

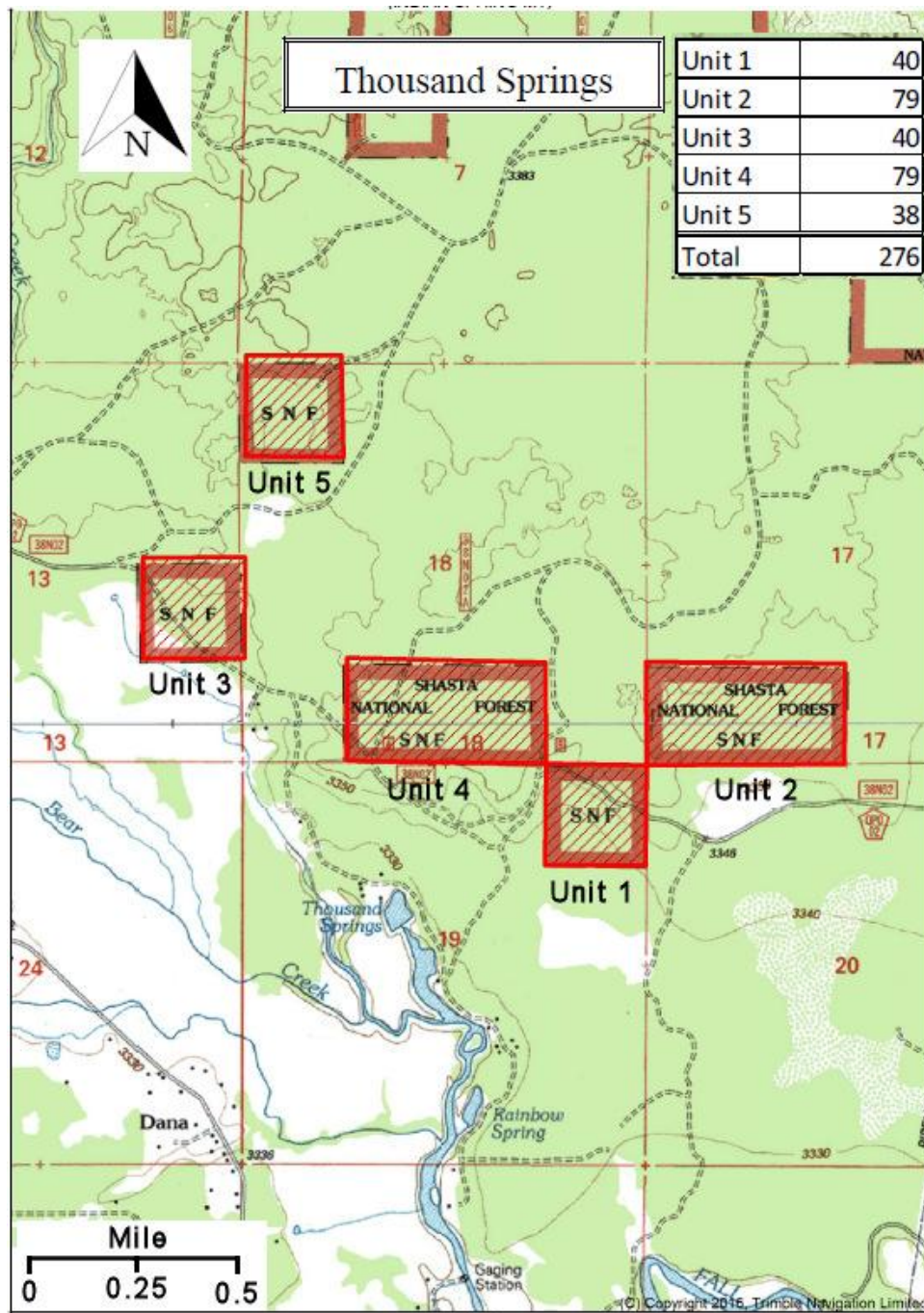


Figure 1. Map of the Thousand Springs Project Area

The Hat Creek Ranger District has made a preliminary assessment that this proposed project may fall under one or more Categorical Exclusion (CE) categories listed under 36 CFR 220.6(e) and Title VIII, Section 8204 of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA), as amended by the 2014 Farm Bill. Projects planned under these CE categories are designed to reduce the risk or extent of, or increase the resilience to, insect or disease infestation and promote forest health (HFRA Sec 602(d)(1)(b)). It is anticipated that a Decision Memo documenting the analysis and effects will be prepared, but the Deciding Official will determine the level of analysis in accordance with issues raised in scoping.

## **PURPOSE AND NEED**

The purpose of the Thousand Springs Project is to continue the fuels management effort on the NFS portion of the forested lands near the community of Dana, California.

The goals of the project are to:

1. Reduce the intensity and severity of future wildfires within the project area by reducing surface and ladder fuels so that post treatment fire behavior is four feet or less flame length.
2. Improve the resilience of timber stands to future disturbance events by reducing tree densities to enhance growing conditions for larger, more fire resilient trees and decrease risk of mortality from insects, drought, disease, and wildfire.

### **Goal 1– Reduce Intensity and Severity of Future Wildfires**

#### **Existing Condition**

The project area is currently at risk to high-intensity wildfire due to high fuel levels resulting from years of fire suppression, drought, and mortality caused from insects. The fuel levels are such that flame lengths during a wildfire occurring under 90<sup>th</sup> percentile weather conditions would exceed 4 feet. Fire crews cannot fight fire directly on the fire's edge when flame lengths are greater than 4 feet.

The project area is described as Fire Regime One: 0-35 year frequency and low severity (surface fire most common) to mixed severity (less than 75 percent of the dominant overstory vegetation replaced), with a current Condition Class of Three, defined as: a high departure from the natural (historical) regime of vegetation characteristics, fuel composition, fire frequency, severity and pattern, and other associated disturbances.

## **Desired Condition**

The desired condition for the project area is one where future wildfires would burn with an average flame height of four feet or less under 90<sup>th</sup> percentile weather conditions, making ignition of crown fires unlikely and allowing for safer conditions under which fire fighters can implement fire suppression actions. Project treatments would be designed to move the project area towards a Condition Class of Two (moderate departure from the natural/historical regime). The long-term goal is to achieve a Condition Class of One (fire regime within historical range), which, will require multiple entries.

## **Need for Action**

There is a need to reduce surface and ladder fuels in the project area to lessen risk of high-intensity wildfire within the WUI; reduce the potential for detrimental effects of large-scale, high-severity wildfire; and contribute to safer conditions under which fire fighters can implement fire suppression actions.

## **Goal 2– Improve Resilience of Timber Stands**

### **Existing Condition**

The forested areas in the project area have received limited forest management and are currently experiencing elevated levels of tree mortality caused by drought and bark beetles. Pockets of mortality occur where densities of small diameter trees are high and there is increased competition for soil nutrients and moisture. These dense stands dominated by younger trees do not meet desired conditions for WUI defense and threat zones (see 2004 SNFPA, ROD pp 40–41) and they contribute to high-intensity wildfires that spread rapidly from crown to crown.

### **Desired Condition**

The desired condition for this area is a healthy forest that is fairly open and dominated by larger, more fire-resilient trees. The retention of large pines and oaks will ensure that habitat conditions for wildlife are maintained or improved while achieving WUI goals.

### **Need for Action**

There is a need to remove dead and dying trees to prevent spread of insect infestations and disease; thin trees in dense stands where small-diameter trees hinder growth of larger trees, which provide better wildlife habitat; and reduce distance between tree crowns to lessen risk of high-severity wildfires.

## **PROPOSED ACTION**

Project goals 1 and 2 would be accomplished using commercial thinning and

sanitation/salvage harvesting of merchantable timber, and biomass thinning of non-merchantable trees and brush to reduce inter-tree competition and reduce surface and ladder fuels. These actions are proposed for each of the five treatment units shown in Figure 1; these units range from 40 to 79 acres and total 276 acres.

The entire area is well suited for mechanical treatment with ground-based equipment since the project area is relatively flat with an average slope of 5 percent. Trees to be harvested would be greater than or equal to 3.0 inches diameter at breast height (DBH) and less than 30 inches DBH, except where noted otherwise. Whole-tree yarding would be utilized when possible. Hand treatments would occur in sensitive resource areas where equipment cannot be used and includes felling trees and pile burning.

Within treatment areas, trees 30 inches DBH and larger and two to three conifer snags (15 inches DBH and larger) per acre would be retained within the limits of safety and operability, with the exception that dead or dying trees would not be retained within 150 feet (approximately one- and one-half tree lengths) of designated Forest roads. Dead and dying trees would be designated using Hazard Tree Guidelines for Forest Service Facilities and Roads in the Pacific Southwest Region (Angwin et al. 2012).

Thinning of the timber stands would be followed by machine piling, pile burning, or under-burning. Machine piling would be determined post-harvest and would only be used in areas of heavy fuels accumulations. Brush-dominated areas would be treated using a combination of machine piling and/or mastication where needed and broadcast burning. Prescribed fire including underburning and pile burning would be used to consume forest litter, existing slash, and activity-generated slash from vegetation treatments. Hand piling may also be used for any sensitive areas. Firelines would consist of roads, skid trails, or hand or machine constructed fireline and may be needed around any units that are adjacent to private land boundaries. Landing pile slash would be piled on the landing for burning.

## **NEXT STEPS**

### **Deciding Official**

The Deciding Official for the Thousand Springs Forest Health Project is Andrew Hart, Acting District Ranger for the Hat Creek Ranger District.

### **How to Provide Scoping Comments**

The Hat Creek Ranger District is seeking your input as it relates to the proposed action and identification of any issues about the anticipated effects from this proposed action. Interested persons, state and local governments, and tribes are encouraged to

participate now and throughout the development of this project. Please respond by December 4, 2020 so your comments may be fully considered as we move through the decision-making (“NEPA”) process with this project.

Comments, written or oral, may be submitted to: Andrew Hart, Acting District Ranger, Hat Creek Ranger District, PO Box 220, Fall River Mills, CA 96028, (530) 336-5521, FAX: (530)336-3338, during normal business hours. Hat Creek Ranger District Office’s business hours are from 8 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday.

Electronic comments, in acceptable plain text (.txt), rich text (.rtf), or Word (.doc) formats, may be submitted to: [comments-pacificsouthwest-lassen-hat-creek@usda.gov](mailto:comments-pacificsouthwest-lassen-hat-creek@usda.gov) using Subject: Thousand Springs Forest Health Project.

Comments received, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be part of the Project Record and available for public review.

Pursuant to the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014 (Pub. L. No. 113-76) and the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Farm Bill) (Pub. L. No. 113-79), projects that are categorically excluded are not subject to pre-decisional administrative review or administrative appeal. Further, they are not subject to legal notice and comment under the pre-decisional administrative review process (36 CFR 218.23).